

**Remarks of Stephen Philip Cohen, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy
Studies program, the Brookings Institution**

House International Relations Committee, US Congress

November 16, 2005

India and the Middle East

Congressman Hyde, and Members of the Committee:

I am honored to appear again before the Committee and share my understanding of India's relations with the major states of the Middle East, especially in light of the newly announced American policy of helping India to become a major power, and of recasting our nuclear relationship.

I certainly agree with the latter, and have argued for something like the administration's proposal for many years.

As for India's emergence as a major power, this is not something that is in American hands to offer or deny; as I wrote in my book, *India: Emerging Power*, India has its own special qualities and advantages, as well as many liabilities, and while its power is balanced, many Indians remain leery of close cooperation with the United States, and none would subordinate Indian interests to American ones. India will not be a dependant state, nor will it become a close ally like Britain; it is more likely to emerge as an Asian France, a state with which we have many shared interests, and even an alliance relationship, but one that sees the world through its own prism, not ours.

These qualifications are particularly important in the case of the Middle East. Five factors steer Indian policy:

1) India is very reliant upon Middle East oil and gas, and must maintain cordial relations with most of the major suppliers, including Iran, UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, as well as Iraq. While these states must sell their oil and gas somewhere, and India is a good customer, Delhi does not want to be vulnerable to a temporary cut-off or an increase in prices. Nor does India want to become dependant upon Pakistan, and the pipeline from Central Asia or Iran to India via Afghanistan and Pakistan is not likely to materialize soon.

2). While a secular democracy, India is also a major Muslim state, and relations with Iran, in particular, resonate in the north Indian heartland, notably Uttar Pradesh. The

other day there was a major rally in Lucknow, a city renowned for its Shi'a culture and links to Iran. Speakers at this rally condemned India's vote in the IAEA, and threatened to bring down the Congress-led coalition should India vote the "wrong" way. This is only another example of the close linkage between foreign and economic policy on the one hand, and domestic India politics on the other. India's preferred strategy is to avoid, at all costs, any stark choice between the loss of domestic political support and achieving some foreign policy goal.

3).. India is hyper-sensitive to criticism of its policies in Kashmir, and wants to keep the major Muslim states from either intervening in Kashmir or supporting Pakistan. It thus conducts a sophisticated balance-of-power diplomacy, hoping to counter Pakistani influence in the Gulf and to keep Kashmir out of all discussions.

4) India's new opening to Israel has brought important technical, intelligence, and military benefits, and more influence in Washington, but some in India are still uneasy with it. I would imagine that New Delhi must continuously calculate the balance between its relations with Tel Aviv and Tehran.

5) Finally, India does not want to run afoul of America's non-proliferation policies in the Middle East, but its strategists have strong reservations about American non-proliferation goals and tactics. This should not be surprising, since Indians were the leaders in building a theoretical case against the NPT and the global non-proliferation regime, and many of its arguments have been taken up by Iran and North Korea. It would have preferred to abstain or simply not appear when the Iran vote took place, and it will look for a way out in the future. India's record of horizontal proliferation—sharing nuclear technology with other states—is very good, but it showed other states how to proliferate vertically—*upward*—in the face of international sanctions and export control regimes.

To conclude on a personal note, I was just as surprised as you were when I heard the news about the nuclear "deal." Although I am sure that some kind of arrangement can be worked out, I think that both sides miscalculated the complexity of this deal and the likely opposition. As a scholar, I am tempted to add that our own abysmal knowledge of India and its politics contributed to this situation, as a proponent of better US-Indian relations I would point out that it is important that other dimensions of the expanding India-US relationship be protected, including economic and military ties, and closer cooperation in science and technology.